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### An exploration of kindergarten children's multiliterate practices in their homes

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# **AN EXPLORATION OF KINDERGARTEN CHILDREN'S MULTILITERATE PRACTICES IN THEIR HOMES**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the  
award of the degree

**DOCTOR OF EDUCATION**

from

**University of Wollongong**

by

**Margaret Turner**

Master of Education (Wollongong)

**Faculty of Education**

**2009**

## **Certification**

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I, Margaret Turner, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment for the award of Doctor of Education, in the Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Signed:

Margaret Turner

Date:

## **Dedication**

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This thesis is dedicated to future generations of young literacy learners, their families and their teachers.

## Acknowledgements

---

This thesis has been a long journey that has impacted not only on my own life but also on the lives of others who have travelled the journey with me. I would like to acknowledge the support of the following people.

To my long-suffering and loving family who believed in me when I didn't believe in myself; my husband Stuart and adult children Simon, Natasha and Ryan. Thankyou! Sanity will, hopefully, return to our future journey together.

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This thesis has now been written, that journey has come to a close; the journey of learning, though, will continue in my own life and in the lives of all who have travelled with me. However, as some of our paths will now take different directions, thankyou for travelling with me thus far, for each of you has supported me when I stumbled, picked me up when I fell down and offered encouragement when it was needed.

## Abstract

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*Children who enter kindergarten bring to the school environment, a wide range of abilities in literacy. Prior literacy experiences in the home and the wider community have been shown to contribute towards these wide ranging abilities and, consequently, future success in literacy at school.*

*Our society today, though, is changing rapidly. Our task, therefore, as educators is to prepare our children to function in a future civilization created by the biggest leap in technology since the Industrial Revolution two centuries ago. We have entered a time when advances in technology are having an important effect on literacy development. The literacy needs and demands of a changing society must be addressed in school when children are very young.*

*This inquiry was an exploration at three Sydney metropolitan schools of kindergarten children's multiliterate practices in their homes. The inquiry endeavoured to establish the relationship between these practices and the socioeconomic backgrounds and gender of these children. It also endeavoured to establish the relationship between the kindergarten children's practices and skills with the expectations of policy and curriculum documents in the first year at school of the New South Wales (NSW) Department of Education and Training (DET).*

*The following research questions guided this inquiry:*

- *What are the multiliterate practices in the homes of kindergarten children at three Sydney metropolitan schools?*
  - *What is the relationship between these multiliterate practices and socioeconomic background?*
  - *What is the relationship between these multiliterate practices and gender?*
- *How do the multiliterate practices and skills of these kindergarten children relate to the expectations, in the first year at school, of current policy and curriculum of the New South Wales (NSW) Department of Education and Training (DET)?*

*The inquiry was qualitative in nature and employed mixed methodologies of ethnographic techniques, case study and narrative inquiry.*

*There were three phases in this inquiry; the initial phase that involved surveying 123 kindergarten parents in three schools; the immersion phase that involved observing five case study children in their homes as they engaged in a range of literacy practices including print and paper-based literacies and techno-literacies, and the analysis of the NSW DET documents relevant to literacy learning in the first year at school.*

*It was found that while socioeconomic background and gender differences existed, all kindergarten children experienced a wide range of multiliterate practices in their homes that comprised print and paper-based literacies and techno-literacies. It was also found that parents held different views about the role that techno-literacies played in learning to read and write and these views seemed to mirror those of early years teachers, namely that print and paper-based skills were more highly valued for young emergent readers and writers.*

*It was also found that assessment of kindergarten children on entry to school did not recognise young children's techno-literacy skills in their out-of-school worlds and while curriculum documents included an extensive range of techno-literacy experiences and expectations of learning by the end of the first year at school, schools needed to do more in providing teaching and learning programs that valued young children's multiliterate experiences.*



## Glossary

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This glossary includes the terms that are used in this inquiry.

### ***CVC words***

CVC means consonant – vowel - consonant. Words containing a consonant, then a vowel and then another consonant are the easiest words for the emergent reader to decode eg. mum, dad, big, dog, cat, not, fun.

### ***Decode***

Sounding out the letters, either one by one, as double sounds, or as chunks of letters, to read unknown words.

### ***Emergent literacy***

The term ‘emergent literacy’ has a narrow but important focus. This inquiry adopts views by Teale and Sulzby (1986) and Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998). Teale and Sulzby (1986, pxx) argue that,

We use *emergent* to suggest that development is taking place, and that there is something new emerging in the child that had not “been” there before. Growth in writing and reading comes from within the child and as a result of environmental stimulation.

Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998, p848) further argue that emergent literacy is used to:

Denote the idea that the acquisition of literacy is conceptualised as a developmental continuum, with its origins early in the life of a child, rather than an all or none phenomenon that begins when children start school. This conceptualisation departs from other perspectives on reading acquisition in suggesting that there is no clear demarcation between reading and pre-reading.

This perspective embraces literacy behaviours in the preschool period as legitimate aspects of literacy. Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) further argue that an emergent literacy approach involves understanding that reading, writing and oral language develop concurrently and interdependently as a result of children’s exposure to

interactions in social contexts in which literacy is a component, and in the absence of formal instruction (McLachlin 2007).

### ***Grapheme***

The smallest unit of writing. A letter or combination of letters that corresponds to or represents phonemes, eg. the 'f' in *frog*, the 'ph' in *phone*, the 'gh' in *cough*.

### ***Graphological information***

Visual information about words and texts in print, eg. punctuation, letter sequences.

### ***Grammatical/syntactical information***

Information about language structure in comprehending a text, eg. sentence structure, text organisation and word order.

### ***High-frequency words***

Words that occur often when reading. They may include words easily sounded out and sight words. They are often related to general knowledge/experience.

### ***Home readers***

In the large majority of primary schools in New South Wales, students in Kindergarten to Year 2 classes take home 'home readers' on either a weekly or nightly basis. Home readers are levelled texts (see levelled texts in glossary) that are given to students to take home to practise reading at home to family and friends. The home readers are then taken back to school to be read to the teacher or parent helpers. The children move up a level of reader when they display an appropriate accuracy rate and understanding of the text at the given level.

### ***Kindergarten***

Means the first year of schooling in a primary school and does not relate to preschool.

### ***Letter-sound relationship***

The association between a sound in English and a letter/letter pattern in words. This assists in word recognition when reading.

***Levelled texts***

Throughout Kindergarten to Year 2 classes in primary schools in New South Wales (and for specific students in classes beyond Year 2 if they are not reading independently), texts for home reading are levelled from Level 1-30 (PM Benchmark Kit 1999, Appendix J). Level 1 is the beginning level and Level 30 is considered to be at an independent reading level. These texts are organised in classrooms in book boxes labelled with the text level. In recent years, many texts have already been levelled, at the appropriate level, by the book companies while other texts need to be levelled by teachers after they have been purchased.

***Literacy***

Encompasses talking, listening, reading and writing.

***Multiliteracies***

The term multiliteracies includes electronic literacies, techno-literacies, digital literacies, visual literacies and print and paper-based literacies.

***Onset/rime***

The separate sounds in a word, ie. the beginning part of the word (onset) and the rest of the word (rime), eg. *b-ark*.

***Print and paper-based literacy materials***

These include:

- all books;
- letters/postcards;
- magazines;
- newspapers;
- comics;
- TV programs;
- advertisements;
- instructions for games and building equipment; and,
- signs in the community.

***Parent***

Also includes primary caregiver.

***Prior literacy experiences***

Includes all literacy experiences prior to entry into Kindergarten, and encompass activities in the home, at child-minding centres or pre-school, and in the wider community eg. outings to parks, libraries, church or Sunday school, the beach or pool, restaurants, birthday parties and/or any family activity or activity with friends.

***Phoneme***

The smallest unit of sound.

***Phonemic/phonological awareness***

The ability to attend to and segment the sound stream into 'chunks' of sound, eg. phonemes, syllables, onset/rime.

***Reading***

*Shared reading* – occurs when the teacher or proficient reader reads aloud to a group or whole class. Students may be grouped so that they can see the text and the teacher can model reading strategies, read for enjoyment, or highlight particular features of a text.

*Guided reading* – occurs when a student reads a text at between 90% and 95% accuracy with teacher guidance to develop reading strategies.

*Independent reading* – occurs when a student reads a text with 95% or more accuracy without assistance.

***Semantic information***

The understanding developed and drawn from when comprehending a text, eg. recognising word sets (antonyms, words related to topic), predicting and following the topic of the text, following groups of words in a logical sequence, looking at layout and features.

***Sight word***

In the early years at school 'sight words' are those words that cannot be easily sounded out eg. school, home, little, friend, teacher. Children need to learn to read these words automatically by 'sight' and without sounding out the letters. They are common words that need to be memorised to enable reading success.

**Syllable**

A unit of sound within a word, eg. *won-der-ful*.

**Techno-literacy materials**

These include:

- TV;
- DVD/videos;
- CDs/tapes;
- talking books on CD or tape;
- computers
- computer programs;
- internet;
- email;
- multimedia CD-ROMs;
- digital camera;
- video camera;
- portable game machines eg. Gameboy;
- TV game machines eg. Sony PlayStation, Microsoft XBox;
- PDA (personal digital assistant);
- MP3 players (music players); and,
- communication equipment (mobile and home phones).

**Text**

Any written, spoken, nonverbal, visual or auditory communication involving language. It will include picture books, novels, conversation, plays, computer graphics and advertisements.

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